

Chapter IV

KUNU

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872 **E**VENTS on the river, as it turned out, showed Sedefo's fears of the large boat that rolled, and of his kunu, only too well grounded. It was to him that there occurred the only mishaps of the entire up-river journey. That what happened proved to be no more serious was, according to the general understanding of our men, to be credited to that personal boat of Sedefo's, whose spirit he had tried on many journeys, and had propitiated with offerings of sacred rum and prayer.

It was also whispered among our men that the Bakra's magic from Africa—a wholly imaginary thing, but which explained to the Bush Negroes our ability to do or withstand things that were not expected of us—had something to do with it, too. For kunu was kunu, and the one in Sedefo's family had shown its hand but too many times of late. Had not the family lost another man only a few months earlier? Had not Zimbi just been buried? And Zimbi's wife, dead less than a year before.

Thanks, then, to his boat, Sedefo's life had been spared. It was not for nothing that he had taken every care when making this boat, that before he had felled the log out of which he had made it, he had addressed himself to the spirit of the tree, explaining that he had need of its wood for a boat, that he would therefore cut it down. He had rendered his thanks for the spirit's permission, as

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was needful, and since then he had often made prayer to his boat, and the boat had carried him safely.

But this is what happened.

On our fourth day up the river we were on our way early, because the men said the falls ahead were difficult, and they wanted to be through them before they stopped to eat. It took us more than an hour to pass the rapids, for the land rose higher and higher, and the water cascaded from one ledge to the next, often in curving channels of swift water that were too deep to allow the use of pole-sticks, and too swift for the paddles to cope with.

There were also those stretches which were without the piled rocks to give the men a footing for pulling the boats over, so that a rope had to be used, and the going was slow and treacherous. Each of the dugouts had this long rope fastened to its prow, and ahead, on the first ledge, were two or more of the men, the other end of the rope in hand, waiting for the signal to start hauling, while holding on to the sides of the boat as they swam were as many men as could be spared, so that if the rope broke, the boat would not be swept downstream, to go crashing against the rocks. These men who faced the fast water of their river, worked as though at the sight of it their Kromanti fighting spirit had entered their bodies, as if not men were there, but an impersonal force pitting itself against the force of the river. Even where the water was not too deep, and they could haul the boat, care could not be slackened for an instant—a wrong turn, and the boat would be capsized, or, what would be as serious, the impact of a rock might cut a gash in its side or bottom, filling it with water faster than they could manage to bring it to a bank. But at last the sound of the falling water was behind us, and the men, once they were in the still water again, went on with the casualness that they fell into with their river when the danger was over, and cast about for a pleasant place to stop and eat.

All at once there was a shout from behind us. Each boat echoed it shrilly. What's that? Whose boat?

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834 "Don't go off into the bush with a man. A child born to
848 you will have a bad bush god, if you do," she added as an
afterthought.

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123 In the other corner, Chief And'u, the bassia, and about
177 half a dozen men were talking of the great book about their
ancestors which the white man had.

"It is large so," said the chief to one of the older men,
indicating an imaginary size which multiplied the size
of the actual volume at least tenfold. "And people say
it has in it pictures of the Apuku gods, small as we ourselves
know them, and a picture of the evil Apuku who appear
as fire in the distance. . . . Mati, white men have gone
into the Kromanti houses in the country of our ancestors
and have made pictures!"

"It is impossible!"

"I want to see!"

The old man said, "I will not look. Books are not for us,
mati."

"But mati, the G'aman has heard, and he wants to see."

The old man shook his head. He would have nothing of
pictures that figured what should never have been allowed
to be photographed.

It seemed prudent to give the conversation a new turn.
137 Down river, the men had said that a man of this village
had lately found a new *neku* liana. Was it so?

"The man who found it was my son," said the old man,
"you should have come for the dance. You would have seen
[802] how we do things here in the bush. But pictures you could
not take. No, mati, if you photograph, you take the soul."

824 The festivities for the find had been especially joyful, he
179 explained, for the boy had only recently come by his gods,
and this had been yet another proof that he would serve
his family capably. For though the find was his own, all
[218] his relatives in the mother's line would enjoy its use. Here-
[226] after, when the poison of its leaves and its slender branches

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187 of the mortar in which she had been pounding maripa nuts
[412] was the Granman's younger wife. The pestle had fallen
from her shaking fingers. She gave the intruders no attention, for she, too, was possessed by her god,—by Toné, god of the river.

"*Ke-ke-ke-ke-ke! Ke-ke-ke-ke-ke!*" The syllables fell from her and, as the white people stood by, her shaking stopped, the sounds did not go on. Then they began again, her body racked, her voice choked. The Toné people do not speak when they are possessed, it is through sounds such as these that the god of the river makes known his wishes.

Women came running toward us. "Your boat is ready, Bak'a," they said.

187 The whites returned with the bracelets to find that the
431 two women to whom they brought their offerings had come
123 as far as the Granman's quarter of the village. Affi's greeting of "Ondyi!" had died down to a whisper. Disconsolately she followed Amasina, who, in the white cloth which reached almost to her ankles, looked tall and sinuous, and moved as though there were something in the still air to send her body curving to one side and to the other.

As the possessed women and those with them entered the quarter, the elder wife of Yankuso came toward Amasina with a large calabash of rice.

"All those who have the same god come with gifts. Amasina has the strongest god of all. It is a white god," a woman explained.

• [802] White was the color for the ancestors, and hers was the god of a great priestess of the family. It was the god Towenu, the great Papa god, the giver of children, the jealous one, who came to her. If he cared for his priestess too well, he allowed her no children. The mention of his name the day before had brought him, and, coming, he vouched for the friendliness of the strangers.

Amasina put her arms about the older woman as she had done to the others who came to her. She sang once more her message:

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172 With this obia, and unafraid, Apatu went. He reached the French shore, and found work. Years later he was asked to guide an expedition against the Indians. They came to a cave. At the other end of it Indians waited with their poisoned arrows.

The French officer said to him, "Apatu, are you afraid?"

"I will go, I am not afraid of death," Apatu said to the officer.

He led the way through the cave, calling out, "Mafi, Yanku na'a, hi!"

Three times the Indians tried to shoot him, and each time they failed.

"The French officer gave Apatu a gold piece for saving his life. That was when they sent him to Pali, and it was written down that he was a great man," ended the Granman.

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● 822 "Do you know what they asked me in the city when I was there?" the Granman said one day, when his elders assembled. "'Chief Yankuso,' they asked me, 'which is better, light or darkness?' I said to them, I said, 'Darkness is better. When it is day we work and we struggle. At night we go into our hammocks with our women, and we find peace.'"

He turned to us as he told the story.

"Is it not so, white man? You yourself are young."

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123 A few days after the gods had spoken, the Granman asked us if we would that evening show the pictures of the country of the Negroes which we had brought. We had shown him earlier the simple projector, actually a flashlight with a lens attached, through which a roll of film passed to flash images, one by one, on a screen. On the film were photographs of illustrations from books on Africa.

Mechanical objects of all kinds fascinated these men of the bush, and they would ask again and again to see our flashlights or the inside of our phonograph. Though un-

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less. Blue beads are very effective in bargaining, for blue is ⁴³⁷ the Djuka's favourite colour. Ear-rings are also good, but not ^[122] perfume; they prefer the acrid odour of insecticides.

The Djukas bargain shrewdly, and are greedy in exactly the sense that children are. The trading begins in the dark interior of a hut, where a Bush Negro lolls in his hammock.

We say: "*Me wanny buy timbeh*"—"I want to buy wooden pieces."

The Negro's common reply is that he has none to part with: "*Me no habbe, massa.*" The word *massa* is a corruption of "master," a vestige of the slave days.

We point to a pierced and inlaid stool and say "*How many?*" meaning, how much does he want for it.

"*Me no wanny fu selly*"—"I don't want to sell it."

To show him we mean business, a concrete offer is made, "*Me gon gibbe six banknoto*"—"I'm going to give six banknoto."

The bargaining is in silver half-guilder pieces, called *banknoto*. The Djukas do not understand large sums of money, except when counted in half-guilder pieces.

If he refuses six coins, we offer seven, eight, nine, and throw in the added temptation of some tobacco leaves. To each of these offers he shakes his head in negation, saying doggedly, "No, no."

Finally, in a tone of voice that indicates we are amazed at our own generosity, we say: "*Me gon gibbe tena banknoto, nanga twee weefee tabak*"—"I'm going to give ten banknoto, as well as three leaves of tobacco."

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[605] More than one person may be involved in the black magic that brings about death, and the burial ceremony may indicate several persons as guilty. This magic is similar to that employed by other primitive peoples. A spirit or soul resides [774] in each living person; if this spirit is destroyed, the person will die. A man can cause the death of his enemy by summoning the spirit out of his enemy's body with herbs and charms and incantations; the spirit can then be shot with a gun. Or else he may procure some of his enemy's nail parings or hair, or any object of close personal association. He should also know his enemy's birthday and secret name. Rites are performed and, as a result, the enemy dies. His spirit has been slain. Magic, therefore, consists of the use of rituals for the purpose of compelling supernatural powers to do one's bidding.

- 123 For this reason many natives object to being photographed.
774 The black camera, they believe, if pointed at them and
● 822 clicked, will draw out their souls. The person owning the camera can then mutilate or destroy their souls at will. On our first expedition among the Bush Negroes all attempts at photography were difficult. When the attempt was made to take a native's picture the black would cry out, "*No purn me!*"—"Don't draw me out!" They firmly believed that the photographer was trying to draw out their spirits for magical purposes. On the second expedition, returning to the same villages with the developed photographs, we showed them to the natives and watched their reaction. The Negroes examined the snapshots curiously, turning them around, not

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being able to accommodate their eyes to the tiny grey perspectives. When the significance of the chiaroscuro dawned upon them, they broke into broad grins and were mightily pleased. After that most of them readily consented to being photographed.

A woman was suspected of causing by witchcraft the death of the late Granman, Amekti, of the Aucaner tribe. She was severely beaten and was not allowed to attend the ceremony of *Broko Day* (breaking day), the time when mourning is broken.

Broko Day is held four or five months after the death of the Granman. Game is hunted and cassava cake prepared for many days prior to the great feast. It is a time of great festivity; there is dancing, singing, and general merry-making. At this time the *Songai*, the *Pekein* play, and the *Susa* dances are held. The participants are generously smeared with pemba dotee and they wear costumes and decorations which are not seen at any other time. Then, as many of the tribe as is possible gather in the village of the erstwhile Granman, and the feast lasts for about a week. Dancing and feasting continue night and day. At this time the ageedah drum—six to eight feet tall—is played, as well as the smaller instruments already referred to. Toward the end of the ceremony, the hair and nails of the corpse are buried, a new Granman is inaugurated, and the deceased ruler is relegated to the position of an ancestor. Prayers may then ascend heaven-ward to him.

Captain Acrowsie of the Aucaner tribe told us some in-

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648 in hiding a significant advantage for the colony, since the lack of workers in agriculture makes itself felt with increasing urgency.

202 Accordingly they promised to satisfy my wish by putting
[123] up the signs customary among them, which would make known to those in hiding my wishes to acquaint them with the good news.

In order to let those in hiding know that they were requested to come out of the forest they go to work in the following manner.

202 They tie white and blue, also perhaps white and black
822 patches of cotton half an ell long and three thumbs wide in Rhineland fashion to the upper branches of the trees, starting in the deepest part of the forest and progressing to the river /31/ bank. The little flags placed highest are of a dark color, while the patches tied progressively lower toward the river are white.

Those in hiding, who stay in the district and cross through the forest to hunt, discover these signs and see by them that there is something going on; either that others in hiding want to establish contact with them or that they have to fear danger.

The manner in which the signs are attached to the trees makes them understand that if they go more deeply into the forest there will be born for them a dark and dangerous future, whereas, if they can decide to go to the river bank they can walk a white, that is, a bright path and that, following the little white flags, they will find people who either want to make common cause with them or wish to give them important information.

202 Since these persons in hiding are constantly afraid of
152 surprise attack or deception, trust in these signs is not always im-
648 mediately established and thus at first only some of them go down with cunning and caution. When they come into the more inhabited districts, they watch and investigate everything that they wish to know; frequently this investigation extends all the way to Paramaribo. Now the Bush Negroes thought that if they followed their custom in this it would be clear to them why these signs had been placed in the bush and that as a result of these they would very quickly become acquainted with the declared amnesty.

202 I must add here also that in fact many fugitives or
648 persons in hiding later came out of the forests, among whom must

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123 Also, I am led to believe that for me they cherish a
466 more than general respect, since already for ten years now they
have been faithful workers for me, a privilege to which no
inhabitant in this colony other than myself can lay claim.

123 A family among them, whose head recently died --
778 according to their statements, through poisoning, which misdeed
[761] is supposed to have taken place out of envy, since I gave him
preference above others, which he deserved on account of his
faithfulness and industry -- has built a hut in the vicinity of its
idol signs, in which they placed a crude image cut out of cedar-
[237] wood and painted with white paint. Beside that image they
placed a little table and on it laid a number of quill feathers from
the pouwies (1), a little bottle with black liquid, symbolizing ink,

1. A pheasant, the Crax alector L.

as well as some slips of paper. Near this little table they dug a
number of steps into the ground, and at the lowermost step they
made a gutter that runs in the direction of the river. Now when
they have a festival with dancing and they want to pay respect
to me, they place near it a number of children who constantly
pour water brought in jugs, which, flowing down the steps into the
gutter, streams riverward. While this ceremony takes place, songs
in my honor are sung by the festive crowd.

• [822] Now the image, according to their conception, is sup-
[829] posed to be a representation of me, /36/ the white color the sign
that I am a white, while the quills, paper, and ink are the attributes
of the Whites' higher civilization, the streaming water that I stem
from the colonists who have come here from across the sea.

123 The wife of the headman referred to above came to me
589 in the town shortly after the death of her husband and remained to
choose my household as her permanent residence, to which I
gladly consented. Faithful and considerate, she performs not only
a great many household services, but even anticipates in this re-
spect the wishes of my wife, and out of love for us refuses any
monetary compensation.

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765 are divided up equally among all the inhabitants of the village. But if the dead person had near relatives in the village, children, nephews, or brothers, it is they who stand the main burden.

[613] Members of the dead person's lineage who are settled in other villages contribute equally to the expenses and the organizing of the funeral, but in a symbolic fashion, (193,)

[423] A council (kuutu) of the village inhabitants sets the date; during the two weeks preceding each one is busy. The women hull and winnow rice, prepare great quantities of couac and sugar-cane juice. The busimā scour the bush and have meat and fish smoked. Each one, according to his means, buys tafia, sugar, chocolate, and other articles of food liked by the Refugee Blacks.

765 The celebration of the rites occupies a whole week. This
775 is because, the Refugee Blacks think the influence of the dead person can be eliminated only progressively by the repetition of the rite of separation.

The first day, the yarka of the dead person whose mourning is going to be lifted is called by formulas beaten on the [535] apinti drum. Then possession dances take place.

765 The second day is reserved for the material preparation for the ceremonies to follow.

[613] The third day, the spouse in mourning, if there is one, is conducted by the members of the dead person's lineage under the mortuary shed. He is dressed in red and is congratulated [822] for having kept the mourning well. Then he is led to the river, [783] and old women of the dead person's lineage begin to bathe him [775] while adjuring the yarka to part company with him.

The fourth day at nightfall, all those present assemble at the mortuary shed. They recite tales (Anāsi tōli), [538] improvisations (mato), and riddles (odo). This phase of the [781] festival has as its object the concentrating of the attention of the hearers; it creates a warm, collective atmosphere which impregnates those present, bringing to them intense and highly colored emotions.

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Most of the Boni are not concerned with their akka. The only ones who take heed of it are those who have reasons to believe it irritated. The worship rendered varies a good deal from one individual to another in the nature and frequency of the rites performed.

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For example, K... of Papaiston village. prey to a persistent streak of bad luck, went to consult a Creole lukumã from Surinam, who revealed to him that it was the doing of unsatisfied desires of his akka. His akka wanted a black dog and a copper bracelet. He procured both for himself, and since, he says, he no longer has the same bad luck.

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B... head of T... village, has in a corner of his hut a post crudely carved in the shape of a bust with a half calabash from which emerge stalks of sangaaфу on its head. At the side is a small fraga tiki. He tells me that this is the god of the cult of his akka; these rites are strictly personal with him.

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Most of the akka esteem white beads and red cloth. If one sees a Boni wear a red cloak, one can be almost sure that it is by order of his akka.

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If someone's mind wanders or he has bizarre dreams, he may see in this the feeling that his akka wishes to leave him and that he is in danger of its happening. He then goes to ask

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an abiaman to make him an akka tetey: this is a ring of fibers worn on the big toe and which is supposed to prevent the akka from going away.

These rites vary a lot from one individual to the other, but they have a common principle. If someone begins to attend to his akka, he cannot abandon the worship during his lifetime, or else the akka will avenge itself.

Akka worship is strictly personal and is not bequeathed upon death.

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241 neglecting these rites. Their rigorous observance has the effect of preventing farming from becoming for them a commercial activity and of keeping a religious and family feeling in it.

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[776] -- The kākāti (silk-cotton tree) is a much feared tree, for according to the elders each one of them shelters 12 categories of divinities, especially a Papa gadu and an Ampuku. So it is absolutely impossible to cut it. One must even be very careful not to injure its roots which spread far. The site of every one felled is preserved. Likewise people watch carefully so as not to injure the roots of the big silk-cotton trees often found in the villages.

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361 Still, the fact that their site was chosen for setting up a village shows that people believe they can make an alliance with the divinities which reside in a silk-cotton tree and draw their protection upon themselves.

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[776] -- The katu tree (*Bombax Surinamiensis*), tree of very large size, living in symbiosis with a parasitic liana which appears to enclose it in a gigantic net, also shelters maleficent divinities (Ampuku, Papa gadu, Bumba gadu). One may cut it down after performing rites whose purpose is to transfer these divinities into another tree.

[435] First, one must have procured from a man who possesses this remedy a pot of abia containing an infusion of leaves in the middle of which is a bracelet of fibers. /262/ It costs two liters of tafia, four liters of beverage (beer for example), one large piece of cloth, and one machete.

• [822] Having arrived at the foot of the tree, one bathes his body and machete with this infusion; one puts the fiber bracelet on one's arm. One also bathes several small sticks provided with squares of white cloth (for the Papa gadu), dark blue and red (for the Ampuku), and a pinot palm (pina tango) leaf.

One plants the sticks at the foot of the tree, one strikes the trunk with the palm leaf while invoking the divinities of